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# The Digital Platform of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas – From Idea to Implementation

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**Abstract** With growing frequency, many digitalization projects aimed at the popularization of various issues concerning so-called traditional culture have been implemented in East-Central Europe over the past years. To meet the current needs associated with easy access to ethnological information, the Research Team of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas, functioning within the Faculty of Ethnology and Education (seated in Cieszyn) of the University of Silesia in Katowice, has undertaken an innovative attempt to process, digitalize and provide access to atlas materials (the deposit of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences). Since 2014, the Faculty of Ethnology and Education in Cieszyn has been running the project *Polski Atlas Etnograficzny – opracowanie naukowe, elektroniczny katalog danych, publikacja zasobów w sieci Internet, etap I / Polish Ethnographic Atlas – scientific elaboration, electronic database, publishing resources on the internet, stage I*. The Polish Ethnographic Atlas is the only ethnographic archive in Poland which covers the whole area of the country. The PEA archives are a unique source of information on the history of rural Poland, collected by ethnographers, ethnologists and folklorists in the second half of the 20th century. However, they have been insufficiently disseminated. This study is aimed at disseminating the effects of the research project under discussion, with a special focus on the specificity of the unique digital platform of the PEA, which functions as the *Cyfrowe Archiwum Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego / Digital Archive of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas*. Currently, there are three collections of ethnographic data available

on the platform: the photographs of the PEA (1954–1971), all published maps (1958–2013) and the PEA questionnaires on the collection of wild plants for consumption and healing purposes (questionnaires with the numbers I–IV) (1947–1953) – about 13,200 objects. All the collections are worth sharing as they are of particular historical value for people interested in rural culture and are the most typical atlas activity.

**Key words** ethnology, Polish Ethnographic Atlas, Poland, protection and preservation of cultural heritage, digitalization, digital platform, digital archive.

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With growing frequency, many digitalization projects aimed at the popularization of various issues concerning so-called traditional culture have been implemented in East-Central Europe over the last years. In Slovakia, owing to the efforts of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the electronic encyclopedia *Tradičná ľudová kultúra Slovenska slovom a obrazom* [*Traditional folk culture in Slovakia through words and pictures*] (more in: *Tradičná ľudová kultúra...*) was published online in 2012, while the *Etnofolk* project is also very important. The ethnological institutions of the four countries in Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia) have combined their efforts in order to provide access to archival graphic, audio, as well as audiovisual documents concerning the historical forms of folk culture, as well as further information about capitalizing on this cultural heritage (more in: *Etnofolk.eu...*). Three years later, Masaryk University in Brno (the Czech Republic) created a geographical information system dedicated to folk culture (the so called *Gistralik*, more in: *Geografický informační systém...*). In Poland, thanks to the project implemented by the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, the *Cyfrowe Archiwum im. Józefa Burszty* [*Józef Burszta Digital Archive*] came into being in 2014 (more in: *Cyfrowe Archiwum im. Józefa Burszty*). Of particular value for the representatives of the social and humanistic sciences are the electronic bases which present some collections of ethnographic data which are not widely known in the scientific environment.

To meet the current needs associated with easy access to ethnological information, the Research Team of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas [further abbreviated to: PEA Research Team], functioning within the Faculty of Ethnology and Education (seated in Cieszyn) of the University of Silesia in Katowice, has undertaken an innovative attempt to process, digitalize and provide access to the atlas materials (the deposit of the Institute of Archeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences).

The Polish Ethnographic Atlas is the only ethnographic archive in Poland covering the whole area of the country. Until recently, the PEA archives were only available to researchers to a limited extent. The wider popularization of the atlas resources was hindered by three fundamental problems: 1. the dispersion of the existing publishing output of the PEA (no coherent collection), 2. the age of the original paper versions (progressive deterioration), 3. the necessity to use them only “in situ” in the Cieszyn archive. The digitalization of the rich PEA archives became a priority, the first task of which was the presentation and popularization of three unique ethnographic collections on the internet. Therefore, the major goal of this undertaking was the popularization of the PEA – “building the awareness of the existence of the resources collected by particular institutions among the recipients who so far have had no opportunity to familiarize themselves with them or even know of their existence” (Paradowski ed. 2010: 31).

The PEA archives are a unique source of information on the history of rural Poland, collected by ethnographers, ethnologists and folklorists in the second half of the 20th century, however – they have been insufficiently disseminated. In contrast to other ethnographic archives, the PEA research comprises the whole area of Poland, which allows for more complex scientific analyses of the cultural diversification of Polish villages. The atlas materials constitute a valuable database; the collection phase has been completed, but many issues are still waiting for scientific study.

This study is aimed at disseminating the effects of the research project with a special focus on the specificity of the unique digital platform of the PEA, which functions as the *Cyfrowe Archiwum Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego* [Digital Archive of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas] (see also: Pieńczak 2015; 2016; Kłodnicki – Pieńczak – Koźmińska 2017).

### **Shaping the concept of digitalization and providing access to the PEA resources**

Ever since the establishment of the PEA Research Team in Cieszyn (1998), most of the attention has focused on analyzing and publishing the documentary field materials which have been collected over the years. This has been linked to the completion of field studies and the regular publishing of the consecutive volumes of “Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” [Commentaries to the Polish Ethnographic Atlas]. The staff of the PEA Research Team gradually developed the idea of digitalizing the archives and making them available on the internet. In 2013, together with the Polish Institute of Anthropology, the PEA Research Team placed an application entitled *Polski Atlas Etnograficzny – opracowanie naukowe, elektroniczny katalog danych, publikacja zasobów w sieci Internet, etap I (2014–2018)* [The Polish Ethnographic Atlas – scientific elaboration, electronic database, publication on the internet, stage I (2014–2018)], which was positively evaluated and approved by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education a year later. The aims of the grant were in line with the ministry’s goals concerning the support of long-term documentary, editorial and research works of fundamental significance for Poland’s heritage and scientific culture. The Faculty of Ethnology and Education of the University of Silesia received 547,878 PLN (about 128,00 euros) for the implementation of this four-year-long project.

### **The project’s main aims and research activities**

*The aim.* The ethnographic materials collected in the PEA Archive require scientific analysis in the form of a synthetic, coherent and easily accessible collection of source data, with the use of specialist scientific and research equipment. On the one hand, the aim is to make the resources available on a large

scale for scientific, educational and promotion purposes, on the other, it is to protect them from further deterioration over time.

*Target groups.* Due to the documentary value of the atlas resources collected over several decades in the 20th century, the project is targeted at various groups, particularly at people dealing with cultural heritage in its broadest sense (e.g. ethnologists, cultural anthropologists, sociologists, educators, geographers, historians and philologists). The results of the project activities can also be useful for other people interested in rural Poland (e.g. museum workers, experts in regionalism, cultural organizers, representatives of public and non-government administrations, school and university students).

*Research tasks.* The project comprises various research tasks (Table 1), implemented mostly by the Faculty of Ethnology and Education (of the University of Silesia), seated in Cieszyn.

Table 1 Research tasks assumed in the PEA digitalization project

No.	Resource type	Research task	Research aim
	published atlas maps	quantitative and qualitative analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– summarizing the analyses and elaborating on the research results,</li> <li>– collecting and supplementing scientific literature on the subject matter</li> </ul>
	atlas photographs and questionnaires with herbaria	quantitative and qualitative analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– summarizing the analyses and elaborating on the research results,</li> <li>– supplementing scientific literature on the subject matter</li> </ul>
	atlas photographs	scientific development of the electronic catalogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– providing internet access for the data,</li> <li>– quantitative and qualitative analyses of the photograph catalogue</li> </ul>
	published atlas maps	scientific development of the electronic catalogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– providing internet access for the data,</li> <li>– quantitative and qualitative analyses of the map catalogue</li> </ul>
	questionnaires with herbaria	scientific development of the electronic catalogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– providing internet access for the data,</li> <li>– quantitative and qualitative analyses of the catalogue of questionnaires with herbaria</li> </ul>
	all the resources discussed	development and analysis of the research results in the form of a scientific publication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– popularization of PEA research works in scientific and non-scientific environments,</li> <li>– development and implementation of the promotional strategy of the project,</li> <li>– information on the project (e.g. websites of the University of Silesia and the Polish Institute of Anthropology)</li> </ul>

Source: based on the author's project leaflet "Wniosek do konkursu w ramach Narodowego Programu Rozwoju Humanistyki moduł 1.1", p. 16 (author's archives).

## Project participants

Ten people took part in the project – several ethnologists,<sup>1</sup> two IT specialists<sup>2</sup> and one museum worker specializing in digitalization projects.<sup>3</sup> They represent various institutions: the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Silesia (Cieszyn), the Polish Institute of Anthropology (Warsaw) and the Museum of Cieszyn Silesia (Cieszyn).

## Digitalization Workshop of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas

For many years, the PEA Archive was situated in the Faculty of Ethnology and Education in Cieszyn (room 124). The collections were kept in a room which also functioned as the atlas workshop, a seminar room and an office. The excessive use of these atlas materials as a result of preparing many B.A. and M.A. theses, as well as the consecutive volumes of “Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” (more in: *Prace dyplomowe...*), combined with strong sunlight exposure and the paper’s high acidity, caused the documents to gradually deteriorate. Most of the PEA materials were moved to a new place in the west wing of the university building (which later became the digitalization workshop).

The financial support from both the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, and the authorities of the Faculty of Ethnology and Education enabled the opening of the Digitalization Workshop of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas (room 119) in 2015. The workshop was prepared according to the main principles defined in *Katalog Dobrych Praktyk Digitalizacji materiałów archiwalnych [The Catalogue of Good Practices in the Digitalization of Archival Materials]* (more in: *Katalog Dobrych Praktyk Digitalizacji...*). The digitalized materials and those planned for digitalization have been secured in closed file cases. The workshop has been equipped with specialist research appliances (including desktop computers and laptops, several A3 and A4 flat scanners, a high quality camera with lens) and its IT infrastructure has been modernized.

An important tool in the digitalization work is the Galeneo software (web application), which enables the scientific development and popularization of the atlas resources in a digital form.<sup>4</sup> The application allows for the collection

1 The team consisted of four ethnologists who acted as expert contractors (Ph.D. hab. Prof. UŚ Zygmunt Kłodnicki, Ph.D. Agnieszka Pieńczak [project coordinator], M.A. Edyta Diakowska-Kohut, M.A. Joanna Koźmińska) and other ethnologists: Ph.D. Michał Rauszer, M.A. Bartłomiej Chromik, M.A. Jacek Szczrybowski.

2 IT support was provided by M.Sc. Sławek Szewieczek and M.Sc. Krzysztof Kasprzyński.

3 B. Eng. Krystian Firla was the expert in charge of the technical side of digitalization.

4 The software is addressed to a wider group of recipients (institutes, archives, cultural centres, art galleries, theatres, libraries, private collectors, etc.), more in: Zafado.



to be easily indexed and archived, it presents selected objects and related information on public websites, and describes the objects using a set of standard boxes or individual descriptions (e.g. Dublin Core).

## The Digital Platform of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas

In September 2014, the use of the Galeneo web application allowed for the activation of the digital platform ([www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl](http://www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl)), operating on the internet as *Cyfrowe Archiwum Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego* [*The Digital Archive of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas*].<sup>5</sup> Currently, there are three collections of ethnographic data available on the platform: “Fotografie terenowe Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” [*The photographs of the PEA*],<sup>6</sup> “Mapy Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego (opublikowane)” [*The published maps of the PEA*]<sup>7</sup> and “Ankiety Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego o zbieractwie roślin dziko rosnących w celach pokarmowych i leczniczych (ankiety I–IV), sygn. A1 (Archiwum PAE w Cieszyńie)” [*The PEA questionnaires on the collection of wild plants for consumption and healing purposes (questionnaires numbered I–IV), A1 (The PEA Archive in Cieszyn)*],<sup>8</sup> see photograph 1. The catalogues created so far include 13,180 objects; each item has been digitally edited in the Dublin Core scheme,<sup>9</sup> which each time comprised 14 or 15 categories (e.g. title, topic, description, author, source, publisher, co-publisher, date, rights, links, format, language, type, identifier and range). What has also been placed on the platform is the information on the scientific output of the PEA staff, project participants, and the subjects of diploma theses based on atlas materials. The general specificity of the atlas resources is also described (see: *Cyfrowe Archiwum Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego*).

The PEA digital platform is clear and easy to operate for prospective users – it has an attractive graphic layout (reflecting the atlas specificity), it is compatible with mobile appliances, the graphic files are available in easily openable formats (e.g. PDF). Moreover, the user has a variety of possibilities to search for the required data thanks to an advanced search engine (e.g. with the help of a catalogue of labels available in the system, through a simultaneous search in all or some of the selected collections, by finding information using

5 The platform was created by the University of Silesia in collaboration with the Institute of Archeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Polish Institute of Anthropology and the Polish Ethnological Society.

6 The collection comprises 12,181 unpublished photographs from field studies (1954–1971).

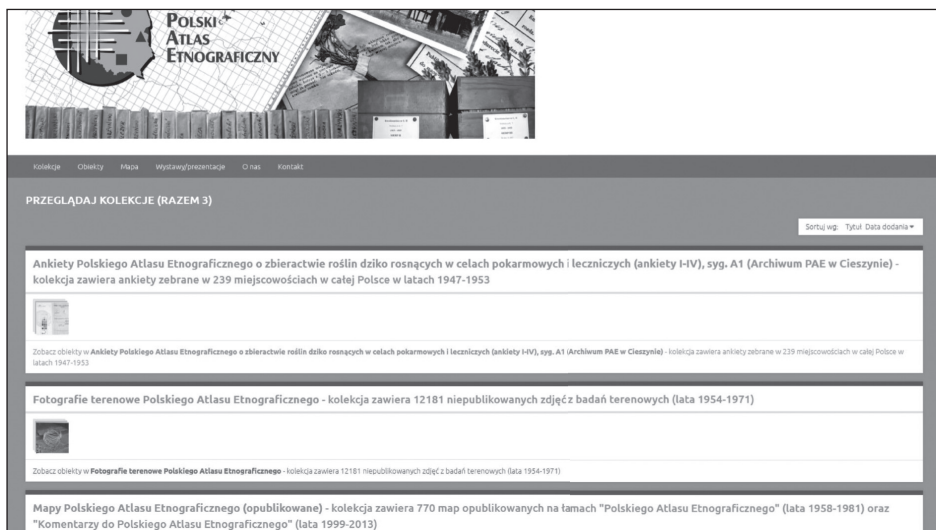
7 The collection comprises 770 maps published in “Polski Atlas Etnograficzny” (1958–1971) and “Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” (1999–2013).

8 The collection comprises 229 objects and about 470 PEA questionnaires on collecting wild plants, acquired from 1947 to 1953.

9 The guidelines from the Digital Library of the University of Wrocław were useful in the processing of the PEA data on the digital platform (see: Komisja ds. digitalizacji BUWr 2006).

the user's own expressions). Another useful tool is geolocation, which enables the accurate identification of a particular place on the map of Poland.

*Photograph 1* The digital platform of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas for indexing archival resources and providing access (screenshot, website [www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl](http://www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl))



## Criteria for selecting objects for digitalization

The resources of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas, painstakingly collected across Poland over many decades, are difficult to estimate. They comprise several dozen meters of ethnographic materials, including surveys and interview questionnaires, maps, photographs and diverse document files. Therefore, only some objects were selected for the project by applying three criteria: 1. the highest historical value, 2. poor state of preservation, 3. in danger of being damaged or destroyed as the result of sharing (Katalog Dobrych Praktyk Digitalizacji: 1). Some of the collections fulfilled all the criteria (e.g. questionnaires with herbaria), so they required earlier conservation work.

The mass digitalization which has begun concerns three large ethnographic collections, consisting of almost 13,200 objects.<sup>10</sup> 1. field photographs, 2. published atlas maps, 3. questionnaires with herbaria, devoted to collecting wild plants. All the collections are worth sharing as they are of particular historical value for people interested in rural culture and are the most typical atlas activity.

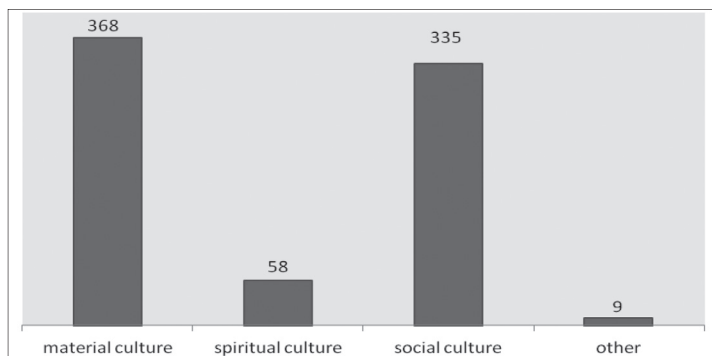
<sup>10</sup> While planning the project, the exact numbers of unpublished resources were not known (no inventory lists).



## Ethnographic collections shared on the PEA digital platform

*The published maps.* The research activity of the Polish Ethnographic Atlas is mostly based around two main areas: documentary work (collecting field material, museum and library search) and interpretative work (processing appropriate classifications which take into account different forms and varieties of the phenomena under investigation, creating maps and providing conclusions from their spatial ethnographic images). The team activities were aimed at creating one coherent collection, consisting of 770 published maps from two sources. The first contains **372 maps**, published by the Institute of the History of Material Culture, in the form of a sample booklet (Gajek ed. 1958) and six large booklets (Gajek ed. 1964–1981), mostly dedicated to material culture. The second source consists of **398 maps**, presented in “Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” (mostly concerning spiritual and social culture – see more: Пенчак 2010, Pieńczak 2011, Drożdż 2012 and *Bibliography*). Apart from the maps presenting cultural phenomena, the platform also has auxiliary maps (23 objects), which help to conduct comparative studies on the scope and occurrence of other (e.g. geographical, wildlife, demographic, anthropological or political) phenomena.<sup>11</sup> As a result of this work, it has been shown that the maps published between 1958 and 2013 were worked on by 45 researchers, six of whom were associated with the atlas research centre in Cieszyn. The most intensive publishing activity of the map authors can be observed in 2002, when two volumes of the “Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” (edited by Zygmunt Kłodnicki) were issued simultaneously in Cieszyn (Figure 1 and 2).

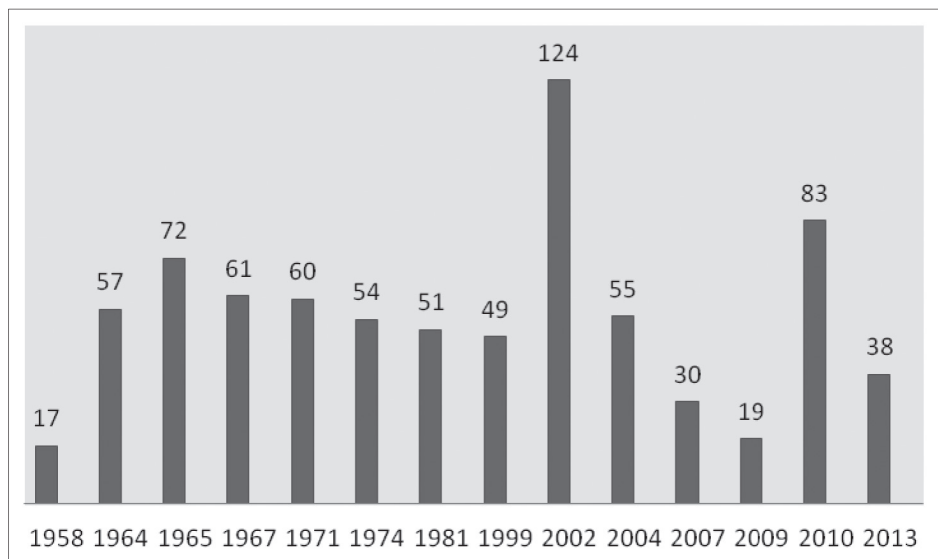
Figure 1 The number of PEA maps published in “Polski Atlas Etnograficzny” [The Polish Ethnographic Atlas] and in “Komentarze do Polskiego Atlasu Etnograficznego” [Commentaries to the Polish Ethnographic Atlas], according to research issues (1958–2013)



Source: own study based on: [www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl](http://www.archiwumpae.us.edu.pl)

11 What appears interesting, for instance, is the PEA map where the borderline between the former partitions was marked (see: Gajek 1971a).

Figure 2 The number of PEA maps published from 1958 to 2013

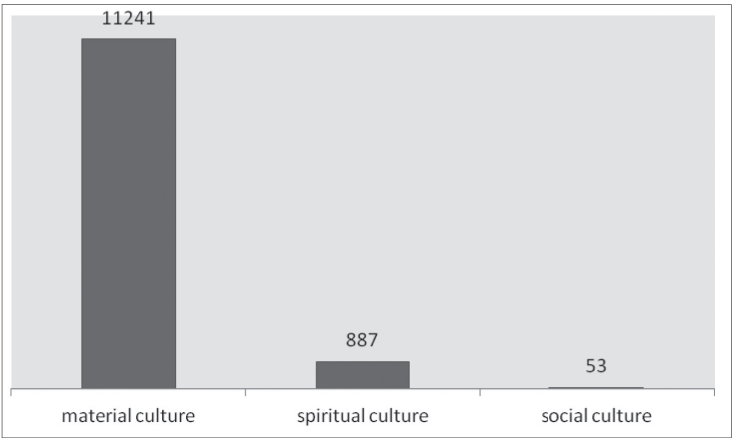


Source: own study based on: Kłodnicki – Pieńczak – Koźmińska 2017: 132

The keywords which characterize the map resources were created using a thesaurus concerning material culture (Kopczyńska-Jaworska – Niewiadomska no year). It comprised basic sections of folk culture, which were processed to varying degrees of thoroughness (e.g. settlement, architecture, agriculture, farm animal breeding, food, transport) and were usually compliant with the subject matter presented on the atlas maps (Figure 1). The labelling of the concepts from spiritual and social culture was done with the use of a dictionary of keywords concerning ethos, rituals, demonology and magic (Robotycki – Babik 2002).

*Atlas photographs.* The digital platform of the PEA also provides access to a large photographic collection which is the result of some field studies conducted for the PEA from 1954 to 1971. Its analogue version consists of 12,181 small inventory cards which have the descriptions of the black and white photographic positives placed on them. The photographs are of unique documentary value (many of the objects shown no longer exist in the cultural landscape of the Polish village) – however, they have never been published in full before. The photographs which are accessible on the platform mostly relate to material culture (Figure 3), especially transport, architecture and food (altogether slightly over 10 thousand objects); other themes are rarer.

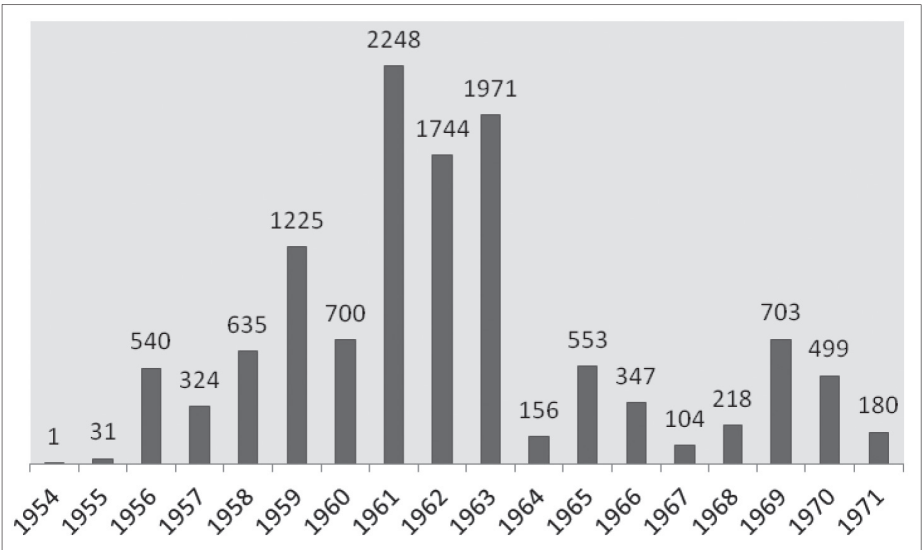
Figure 3 The number of PEA photographs according to research issues (1954–1971)



Source: own study based on: Kłodnicki – Pieńczak – Koźmińska 2017: 135

The research into the collection reveals that the photographs were taken in over 440 villages in Poland by 61 people. Among them were regular members of the atlas staff and other temporary workers (e.g. students). Some researchers took over 2,000 photographs (e.g. Janusz Bohdanowicz, Jerzy Grocholski). Almost half of the photographs in the Cieszyn workshop (about 6,000) come from the period 1961–1963 (Figure 4). The oldest photograph in the collection was taken in 1954 in the village of Dzierżazna (see: Bohdanowicz 1954).

Figure 4 The number of PEA photographs taken in 1954–1971

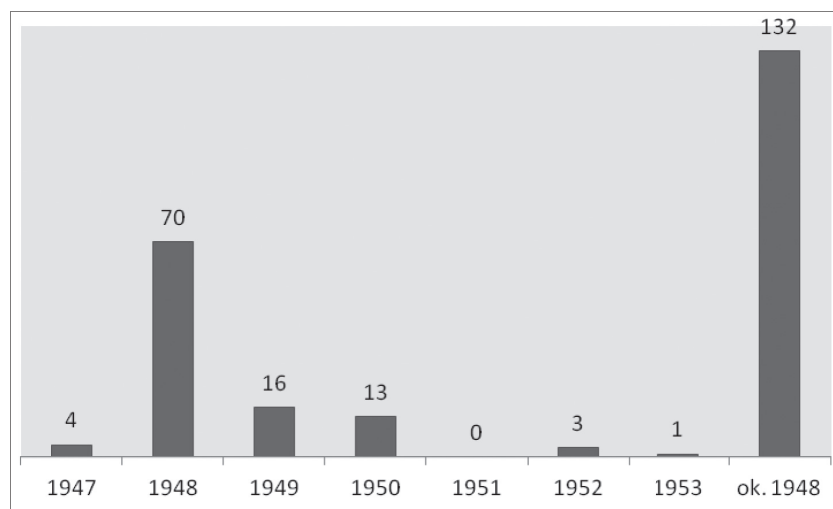


Source: own study based on: Kłodnicki – Pieńczak – Koźmińska 2017: 138

During the digitalization of the photograph catalogue, many corrections and additions were made. There are “comments” on some of the object cards which provide information for verification and more detail and contain the notes seen on the reverse side of inventory cards (about 9,000 cards, see e.g. Kwaśniewski 1956),<sup>12</sup> the corrected inventory numbers of some photographs (about 200 objects, see e.g. Kopydłowska 1965), as well as the data concerning the approximate (due to various reasons) geolocation of places (about 170 objects, see e.g. Grocholski 1967). These activities were tedious and time-consuming, yet they were vital in order to increase the scientific reliability of this catalogue.

*Questionnaires with herbaria.* The collection comprises about 230 villages in Poland where the questionnaire studies on collecting wild plants for consumption and healing purposes were originally conducted (questionnaires numbered I–IV from 1947 to 1953, figure 5). These archival resources had been presented earlier to the scientific environment by, among others, Łukasz Łuczaj – an ethno-botanist who, many years ago, drew attention to the substantial documentary value of a collection of herbaria which was unique in Europe (see: e.g. Łuczaj 2008); the herbaria were also mentioned by the team which worked on the Polish Ethnographic Atlas (Kłodnicki – Drożdż 2008). Earlier in my article, I presented the questionnaires in detail, and at the start of the research I looked at how to provide access to these resources (Pieńczak 2016). The research into the scientific work on the collection has now been completed and is available on the internet.

Figure 5 The number of herbaria questionnaires from 1947 to 1953



Source: own study based on: Kłodnicki – Pieńczak – Koźmińska 2017: 141

12 For example: On the back of the inventory card is a stamp “temporary work” dated May 1965.

## The prospects for further digitalization work

Many of the documents collected in the Cieszyn workshop are still awaiting scientific processing. The next stages of the PEA digitalization project involve a plan to provide digital access to questionnaires on birth, wedding and funeral rituals (about 1,000 notebooks), which have been analysed most frequently in the PEA collections during the source search. In the resources collected in Cieszyn, there is also the collection of maps prepared for publication which is still under the scientific supervision of Józef Gajek in Wrocław (booklet VII–IX), which comprises 237 maps (a list of the unpublished maps: Kłodnicki 2001). There is still some hesitation over whether to print the unpublished PEA booklets. They were prepared in the 1980s in the academic centre in Wrocław. The methodological bases for these maps do not differ from hundreds of previous ones published in booklets I–VI – they take into account the expert literature, archival data and the data from ethnographic museums. Undoubtedly, it would be valuable to make additions with the earlier data, provided they are appropriately marked on the maps.<sup>13</sup> What seems to be a drawback is the same symbol used in the maps for a lack of data and for negative statements, i.e. no occurrence of particular phenomena or artefacts. The verification of these issues would require an enormous amount of work. Therefore, the publication of these several hundred maps has been postponed, especially due to some of the discrepancies which have been found between the legends and the maps (see: Kłodnicki – Pieńczak 2019).<sup>14</sup>

What has been planned for the future is the dissemination of the resources by preparing the *Atlas dziedzictwa kulturowego wsi polskiej* [An Atlas of the Cultural Heritage of the Polish Village] – a project where some particularly representative cultural phenomena will be presented on maps – phenomena which may become the subject of comparative study in the context of other Central European atlases. In the *Atlas dziedzictwa kulturowego wsi polskiej* we mainly want to present maps which are related through systematics and chronological cross-sections to the largest number of maps in other European atlases. Our intention is to elicit some cognitive values from the atlas materials, which is why certain issues have been examined once more. This will enable other researchers to use these sources more critically (see: Kłodnicki – Pieńczak 2019).

October 2018

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13 These are mostly drawn from the 19th century volumes of Oskar Kolberg and from later published materials based on his studies as well as ethnographic journals – “Wisła”, “Zbiór Wiadomości do Antropologii Krajowej”, “Materiały Antropologiczne, Archeologiczne i Etnograficzne”, “Ziemia”.

14 Access to these maps can be provided in the archives of the PEA Section in Cieszyn, following prior arrangement with Agnieszka Pieńczak (agnieszka.pienczak@us.edu.pl; tel. 0048 338546176).

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